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Peter Thonemann
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Part I

Globalization

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1

Alexander and the transformation of Greek coinage

I The Sinanpaşa hoard

In the early years of the twentieth century, a poor Turkish farmer made his fortune overnight. Somewhere near the modern town of Sinanpaşa, deep in the highlands of central Turkey, the soil gave up an enormous hoard of ancient silver coins, buried there more than 2,200 years earlier (Fig. 1.1). We will never know how many coins the farmer originally dug up from his fields, since the coins were quickly dispersed on the international antiquities market. Still today, this remains the fate of most large coin hoards discovered outside of official excavations. As I write this paragraph, on 15 August 2013, a US coin-dealer called 'zoderi' is offering on eBay thirty-two tetradrachms of Alexander the Great, all evidently from a single hoard, for between $320 and $780.

Between 1919 and 1927, the American scholar and collector Edward T. Newell (1886–1941; Fig. 1.2) tracked down hundreds of coins from the Sinanpaşa hoard from coin-dealers in Athens, London and the United States. Thanks to Newell's efforts, we can today identify 670 coins which are known for certain to come from the Sinanpaşa hoard, almost all of them (640 out of 670) now in the collection of the American Numismatic Society in New York (*IGCH* 1395; Thompson 1983: 86–9).

From the surviving coins, we can be pretty sure that the hoard was buried in 317 or 316 BC. All of the Sinanpaşa coins are drachms on the so-called 'Attic' weight-standard (named after the abundant coinage of Classical Athens), weighing around 4.30 g. These drachms all carry the same images on their two faces. The front, or 'obverse' face, depicts a bust of Heracles, the legendary ancestor of the Macedonian royal house, wearing a lion-skin headdress. The back, or 'reverse', shows a male deity seated on a throne, holding an eagle on his right hand, with the name (in Greek) of a Macedonian king running vertically to the right of the throne. Most of the coins carry the name of the young conqueror who, between 334 and 323 BC, changed the course of world history: Alexander III ('the Great') of Macedon (Fig. 1.3).

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Figure 1.1. Drachms from the Sinanpaşa hoard, buried in 317 or 316 BC, probably by a Macedonian veteran of Alexander's army. ANS.

The Sinanpaşa hoard bears silent witness to the dramatic events which had played out across the whole of the Near East, from the Mediterranean to India, in the twenty years or so before its burial. In 336 BC, Sinanpaşa lay deep within the Persian empire, a vast patchwork of different societies and cultures stretching from Egypt to the Himalayas, ruled over by the Achaemenid dynasty of western Iran. This empire had enjoyed a remarkable stability for more than two centuries, in large part thanks to the Persian kings' hands-off style of government (Wiesehöfer 2009). Persian rule often meant little more than a token payment of tribute to the far-off Iranian royal court, leaving the empire's subject peoples to enjoy very substantial religious and cultural freedoms.

Despite its long and prosperous history, the Persian empire was in effect little more than a loose confederation of heterogeneous, quasi-autonomous culture-zones, bound together solely by the person of the Great King and his tribute-collectors. This helps to explain why the Macedonian invasion of Asia enjoyed such brutally swift success (Briant 2010). In less than four years, between his crossing to Asia Minor in 334 BC and his capture of the

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Figure 1.2. Edward T. Newell (1886–1941). Newell's personal collection of more than 87,000 coins is now held by the American Numismatic Society in New York. ANS.

Figure 1.3. Silver drachm of Alexander the Great, from the Sinanpaşa hoard (Lampsacus mint, *c.* 323–317 BC). The reverse legend reads Alexandrou, 'of Alexander'. 4.26 g ('Attic' weight-standard). ANS 1944.100.29876.

Persian heartlands in 331 and 330 BC, Alexander of Macedon swept this vast empire into the dustbin of history. By the time of Alexander's death at Babylon in the summer of 323 BC, the inhabitants of Egypt, Syria, Iran and

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Bactria were learning to live with a new ruling elite of Greeks and Macedonians.

No one has evoked the impact of the Macedonian conquest better than John Keegan, in his wonderful book *The Mask of Command*:

> Imagine a highland Napoleon. Imagine a Bonny Prince Charlie with European ambitions who, having won back Scotland from King George II, sets off at the head of his clans not just to conquer England – a mere preliminary – but to cross the Channel, to meet and beat the French army on the River Somme, then journey south into Spain to besiege and subdue its principal fortresses, return north to challenge the Holy Roman Emperor, twice confront and defeat him at the head of his own forces, seize his crown, burn his capital, bury his corpse and finally depart eastward to cross swords with the Tsar of Russia or the Sultan of Turkey. Imagine all this compressed into, say, the years 1745–56, between the princeling's twenty-second and thirty-third birthdays. Imagine on his death, at the age of thirty-two, the crowns of Europe shared between his followers – Lord George Murray ruling in Madrid, the Duke of Perth in Paris, Lord Elcho in Vienna, John Roy Stewart in Berlin, Cameron of Lochiel in Warsaw, a gaggle of tartaned chieftains braying for whisky in the small courts of south Germany and London garrisoned by a crew of bare-kneed highlanders. (Keegan 1987: 13)

The Sinanpaşa hoard almost certainly belonged to one of this 'crew of bare-kneed highlanders', a grizzled veteran of Alexander's expeditionary army, many of whom settled permanently in the East in new city-foundations like Docimeium, a Macedonian colony 45 km east of Sinanpaşa (Thonemann 2013b: 15–24). Quite probably, as we shall see in a moment, the 670 silver drachms of the Sinanpaşa hoard represent the remains of this veteran's back pay for his long and bloody service on Alexander's Asiatic campaign.

But even at the moment that the Sinanpaşa hoard was buried, a mere seven years after Alexander's death, the new Macedonian empire was beginning to fracture. Alexander's sudden death at Babylon in 323 had left his kingdom without an obvious heir. In the end, the kingship was shared between his as yet unborn son by the Bactrian Roxane, the future Alexander IV, and his mentally disabled half-brother Philip III Arrhidaeus (Bosworth 2002: 29–63). The short reign of Philip III Arrhidaeus has left its traces on the Sinanpaşa hoard: eighty-eight of the drachms in the hoard carry Philip's name in place of Alexander's (Fig. 1.4). But Philip III and

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Figure 1.4. Drachm in the name of Philip III Arrhidaeus, from the Sinanpaşa hoard (Abydus mint, *c.* 323–317 BC). Large numbers of Alexander-style coins with Philip's name on the reverse (Philippou, 'of Philip') were struck between 323 and 317 BC. 4.29 g. ANS 1944.100.84469.

Alexander IV were kings in name only. Real power was held by the generals who commanded the remains of the great Macedonian royal army (Perdiccas, Eumenes, Antigonus the One-Eyed) and, above all, by the Macedonian nobles who governed the various provinces or 'satrapies' of the Macedonian empire (Ptolemy in Egypt, Lysimachus in Thrace, Seleucus in Babylon).

By the time the Sinanpaşa hoard was buried, Philip III was probably already dead, murdered at the hands of Alexander's mother, Olympias, in the autumn of 317. The young Alexander IV was killed on the verge of adulthood, probably in 309 BC. Between 306 and 304, the strongest of the Macedonian 'successors' – Antigonus in Asia Minor, Ptolemy in Egypt, Lysimachus in Thrace, Cassander in Macedon and Seleucus in Babylon – all claimed the title 'king' in their own right (Gruen 1985). By 277 BC, the former Macedonian empire was left divided among three new great powers: the Antigonids, by now installed in Macedon and mainland Greece, the Ptolemies in Egypt and much of the eastern Mediterranean, and the Seleucids in Asia.

The cultural impact of the Macedonian conquest of the Near East can be seen wherever you look. In some regions, such as Asia Minor (western Turkey), the encounter between Graeco-Macedonian and non-Greek cultures was a creative and mutually beneficial one, with Lycians, Carians, Phrygians and others enthusiastically adopting the cultural trappings of Greek life (Vlassopoulos 2013: 290–302). Elsewhere, such as in Egypt, more sharply stratified colonial societies developed, with a small Greek ruling class enjoying very different lifestyles from the native Egyptian masses (Bingen 2007: 215–55; Manning 2010: 73–116). In a few places, such as Judaea, the meeting of cultures ended in violent and destructive conflict (Millar 1978; Gruen 1993). The old Greek world of the Aegean, too, was transformed by the great Macedonian adventure in the East. The

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globalization of Greek culture lent a renewed importance to the cultural centres of the old Greek world (Athens, Delphi, Delos), and the old Greek *poleis* pursued federal institutions more vigorously than ever before in the face of Macedonian power (Chapter 4 below).

In 1913, William Tarn began his magnificent biography of Antigonus Gonatas with a memorable evocation of the mindset of the early Hellenistic man:

> All the horizons have widened and opened out; civilization pulsates with new life, and an eager desire to try new things. . . For there is so much to be done; nothing less than the conquest, material, social, intellectual, of a whole new world. In his desire to master that world, he shrinks from no effort, and he achieves. The dark places of the earth contract before him; one language now takes him from the Rhone to the Indus, from the Caspian to the Cataracts. (Tarn 1913: 1)

Coinage is a wonderful category of evidence for the cultural and linguistic globalization which Tarn rightly saw as a hallmark of the centuries after Alexander's death. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the late fourth and the third century BC saw the emergence of a numismatic common culture – what the Greeks would call a '*koinē*' – stretching from northern Europe to central Asia, and from Carthage to Arabia. This was also an era in which cultural identities underwent dramatic transformation, not least in the traditional Greek world of the Aegean (Chapters 3 and 4). Cultural change is perhaps particularly stark along the outer fringes of the Macedonian empire; Chapter 5 will show some of the ways in which coin iconography can help illuminate these new hybrid 'Hellenizing' identities. The existence of the great Macedonian imperial states had profound effects on the shape and scale of local and regional economies, which we can only understand through close analysis of coin-finds and minting patterns (Chapters 6 and 7). Finally, royal coinages tell us a great deal about how Macedonian kings wished to be seen by their subjects (Chapter 8) – just as, in a slightly later period, coinages minted by Roman generals and provincial officials show us how the Roman conquest of the Greek world was 'spun' for a Greek audience in the late second and first century BC (Chapter 9).

The Sinanpaşa hoard, the abandoned wealth of some anonymous Macedonian infantryman, living out his last years deep in the quiet grey hills of central Turkey, is a poignant emblem of the transformation of the Near East wrought by Alexander and his Macedonian successors. But to understand the full significance of this cache of silver drachms, we need to

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take a more detailed look at the remarkable coinage of Alexander the Great, where the whole story of Hellenistic coinage begins.

II The royal coinages of Philip II and Alexander III of Macedon

On his accession to the Macedonian throne in 336 BC, after the murder of his father, Philip II (ruled 359–336 BC), Alexander inherited a long tradition of royal coinage stretching back to his ancestor Alexander I 'Philhellene' (ruled *c.* 498–452 BC) (Westermark 1989; Dahmen 2010; Kremydi 2011). Philip's own gold and silver coinages were struck in very large quantities, particularly towards the end of his life, and offer vivid evidence for how Macedonian kings wished to be seen, both at home and abroad, in the mid-fourth century BC (Le Rider 1977; 1996).

The royal gold coinage of Philip II was struck on the 'Attic' weight-standard, based on a 'stater' ('standard coin') of *c.* 8.60 g. These coins carried a bust of the god Apollo on the obverse, with a two-horse chariot and charioteer and the legend Philippou ('of Philip') on the reverse (Fig. 1.5). As Plutarch tells us, this last image was chosen to commemorate Philip's chariot victory at the Olympic games in 348 BC (Plut. *Alex.* 4.9). Philip, like his predecessors, was intensely conscious of the Macedonians' ambiguous ethnic status as a people on the fringes of the Greek world (Engels 2010; Hatzopoulos 2011). The Greek historian Herodotus recounts an illuminating episode around 500 BC, when the 'Greekness' of Alexander I of Macedon was very publicly called into question at the Olympic games:

> When Alexander decided to compete at the Olympic games, and came down to Olympia to do so, the other Greek competitors tried to stop him on the grounds that the contest was not for barbarians but only for Greeks. But when Alexander proved that he was actually an Argive, he was judged to be a Greek, and competed in the foot race, where he came equal first. (Hdt. 5.22)

Figure 1.5. Gold stater of Philip II, struck at Amphipolis (*c.* 340–328 BC). The types commemorate Philip's Olympic chariot victory of 348 BC. 8.58 g. ANS 1944.100.12024.

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Evidently Alexander's ethnicity was, to say the least, a matter of perspective. His claim to be a Greek rested on the Macedonian kings' alleged descent from the legendary Argive hero Heracles; but in the eyes of the other Greeks competing at Olympia, Alexander was very definitely not part of the 'club' (Hall 2002: 154–68). This story beautifully explains why Philip chose to commemorate his Olympic victory so prominently on his gold coins. To have competed successfully at Olympia was the best possible proof of the 'Greekness' of the Macedonian royal house.

Philip's abundant silver coinage, based on a local Macedonian drachm of *c.* 3.60 g, embodies a similar set of messages. His silver didrachms ('two-drachm pieces', weighing *c.* 7.20 g) carry a bust of a youthful Heracles wearing a lion-skin headdress on the obverse – a reminder of the legendary ancestry of the Macedonian kings – with a horse and jockey on the reverse, perhaps celebrating Philip's victory in the Olympic horse-race of 356 BC (Plut. *Alex.* 3.8) (Fig. 1.6). His tetradrachms ('four-drachm pieces', weighing *c.* 14.45 g) also carry a horse and rider on the reverse – some, like the example illustrated in Fig. 1.7, possibly showing the king himself on horseback – but this time with a bust of Zeus as the obverse type.

In the early years of his reign, Alexander III seems to have struck no coinage in his own name, but to have continued minting with his father's coin-types. This phenomenon of 'posthumous' minting would go on to

Figure 1.6. Silver didrachm of Philip II, struck at Pella (*c.* 342–336 BC). The obverse type recalls the legendary descent of the Macedonian kings from the hero Heracles. 6.73 g. ANS 1944.107.1.

Figure 1.7. Silver tetradrachm of Philip II, struck at Pella (*c.* 356–348 BC). These coins were struck in vast quantities in Macedon, both before and after Philip's death in 336 BC. 14.36 g. ANS 1967.152.197.

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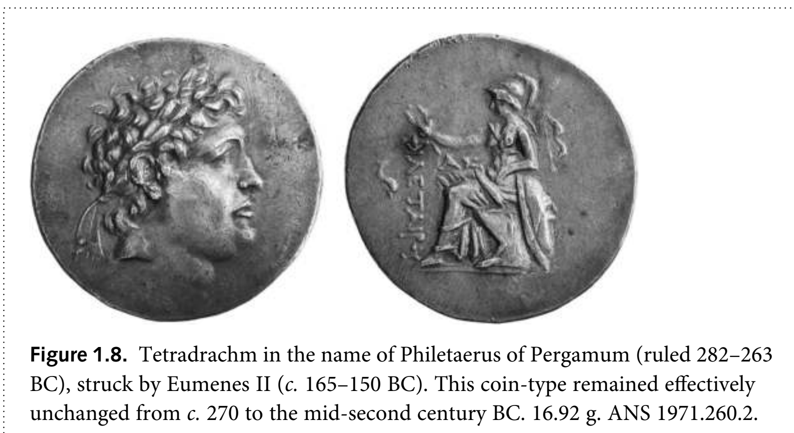

Figure 1.8. Tetradrachm in the name of Philetaerus of Pergamum (ruled 282–263 BC), struck by Eumenes II (*c.* 165–150 BC). This coin-type remained effectively unchanged from *c.* 270 to the mid-second century BC. 16.92 g. ANS 1971.260.2.

become very common in the Hellenistic world. To take an extreme example, the silver coin-types of Philetaerus of Pergamum (ruled *c.* 282–263 BC), the founder of the Attalid dynasty, continued to be used virtually unchanged by all of his successors right down to *c.* 150 BC (Fig. 1.8; Westermark 1961; Meadows 2013: 154–81). 'Posthumous' coinages of this kind served various purposes. For a new king, they were a way of indicating dynastic continuity with a popular predecessor. More practically, when a coin-type had become familiar through widespread use (as was certainly true of Philip's huge gold and silver coinages), carrying on with the same types would help ensure that one's own coins would be widely accepted.

At an uncertain date, but probably before the beginning of his Asiatic campaign in 334, Alexander introduced a new gold coinage in his own name alongside the 'posthumous' gold staters of Philip (which in fact continued to be struck in Macedon right down to *c.* 315 BC: Le Rider 1993). Alexander's gold staters and distaters carried on the obverse a portrait of Athena wearing a Corinthian helmet, closely imitating her portrait on contemporary coins of Corinth (Figs. 1.9–1.10). This 'Corinthian' Athena surely refers to Alexander's status as leader (*hēgemōn*) of the League of Corinth, an alliance of Greek states founded by Philip II after his victory at Chaeronea (Poddighe 2009). The reverse type carries the legend Alexandrou ('of Alexander') alongside a winged figure of Nike, a personification of victory, grasping a *stylis* (a kind of flagpole which stood on the stern of a warship: Sergueenkova 2006).

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